

By Rep. Russ Carnahan (D-MO) and Rep. Anh "Joseph" Cao (R-LA), The Hill
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As the tragic events in Haiti continue to unfold, the massive international response has demonstrated the good that is possible when countries and international organizations partner to meet a crisis.

In fact, it is often in moments of crisis that our concept of community expands, knocking down geographical, language and ideological barriers. Hurricane Katrina, the swine flu pandemic, the global economic meltdown, the floods that devastated the American Midwest in the early 1990s, and the September 11 attacks – these events and their aftermaths all serve as a stark reminder that some problems are hard to solve on our own. Some challenges require international cooperation; they cannot be solved by the United States or any one country alone.

That is why we are launching the American Engagement Caucus, a bipartisan Congressional panel dedicated to the premise that American leadership and a willingness to partner with other countries are strategies that clearly serve our nation's best interests.

In the midst of two wars abroad and a weak economy at home, some have said that we need to retreat from the international stage, stop participating in multilateral bodies and cease engagement with other nations. This is an all-too human reaction. But we must steel ourselves against such isolationist sentiment. Walls cannot protect us from pandemic disease or global economic failure; they do not end the threat of terrorism; and they will not protect us from the effects of climate change.

We live in an age of interdependence. America's security, economic, environmental, and moral interests are inextricably linked with those of the international community. Simply put, it is in our vital national interest to support international engagement. Here are several reasons why:

- Engagement complements a "Smart Power" strategy: To achieve our security objectives, America must project smart power—a blend of military strength and creative diplomacy. As Defense Secretary Robert Gates observed, "One of the most important lessons of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan is that military success is not sufficient to win: economic development, institution-building and the rule of law. . . along with security, are essential ingredients for success."

- Global partnerships are essential to fighting the war on terror: Given existing threats from terrorist groups and unstable foreign regimes with nuclear capabilities, cooperating with

countries around the world is critical. Other nations can help shoulder the burden of counterterrorism and intelligence efforts, especially in regions where the U.S. may lack access and leverage.

- International engagement expands trade opportunities: By creating new international markets, we can capitalize on the power of American innovation to spur economic development and job growth here at home.
- America's economic and environmental interests are irrefutably connected: We must build mechanisms to ensure that the world's major economies reduce their climate-damaging emissions. Clean energy strategies will reduce our dependence on foreign oil, revitalize the American heartland through clean energy production and give developing countries a chance to meet their own energy needs and alleviate poverty.
- A strong relationship between the United States and the United Nations is key to rebuilding alliances: U.S. standing in the world is in large ways shaped by and representative of our engagement with the UN. It is in America's economic, environmental, and security interest to work with the UN to solve global challenges.

The American Engagement Caucus aims to promote these principles and provide a forum where we can discuss the benefits and challenges of working multilaterally. We will highlight the successes of countries partnering together to address transnational problems. And we will explore how working cooperatively with other countries and through multinational bodies ensures that we do not have to carry the burden alone or take on all of the risks for global security and progress.

Historically, America has been the most respected nation in the world because of our commitment to working with all countries on behalf of freedom, peace, and other common objectives. Steadfast American engagement helped end two world wars and succeeded in bringing a peaceful resolution to the Cold War.

Now, in this new era of global challenges, we must find creative approaches for working together to create a safer, more peaceful and prosperous world.

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December 6, 2008, Cao was elected as Louisiana's 2nd Congressional District Representative making him the first Vietnamese-American elected to United States Congress.

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